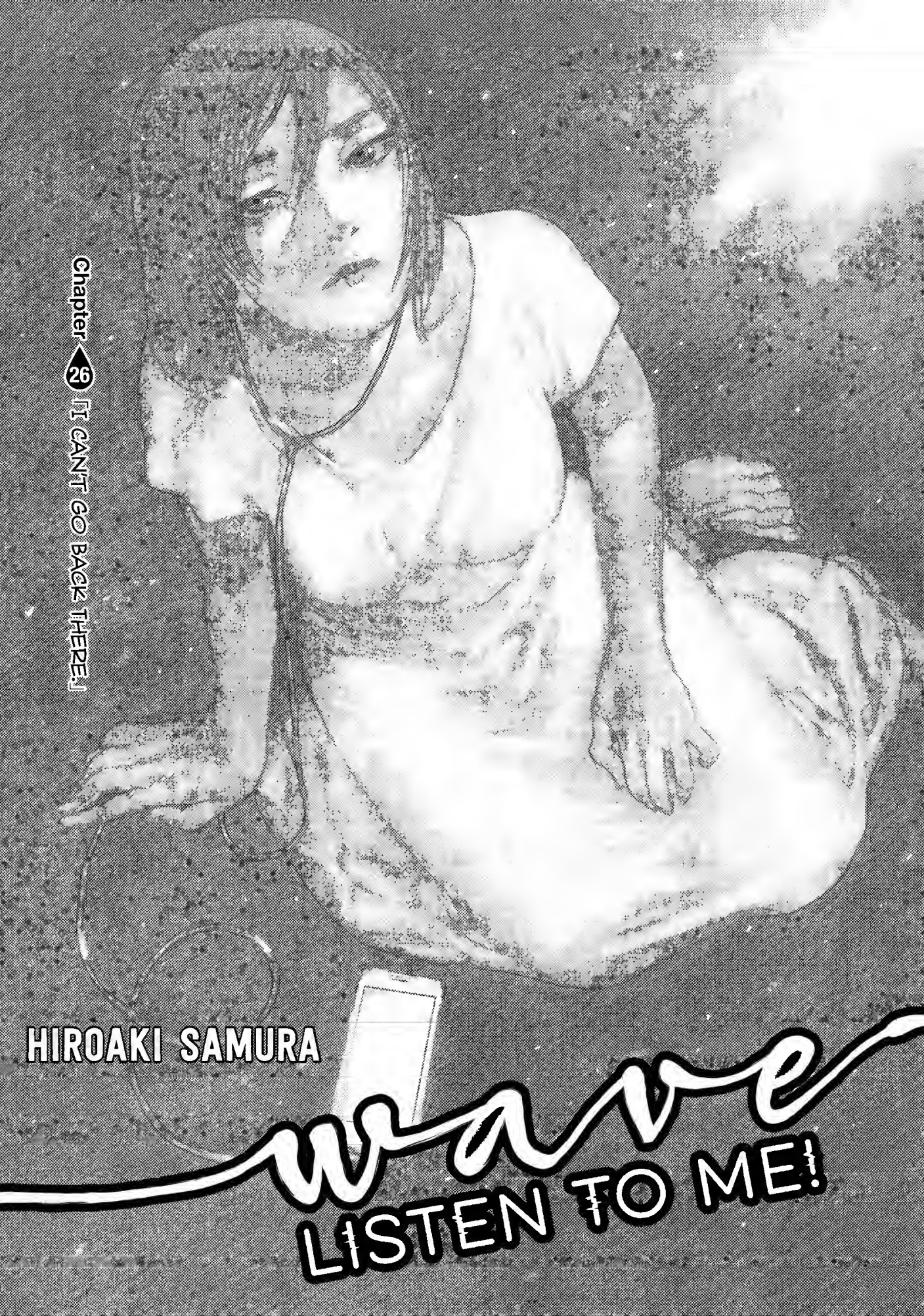
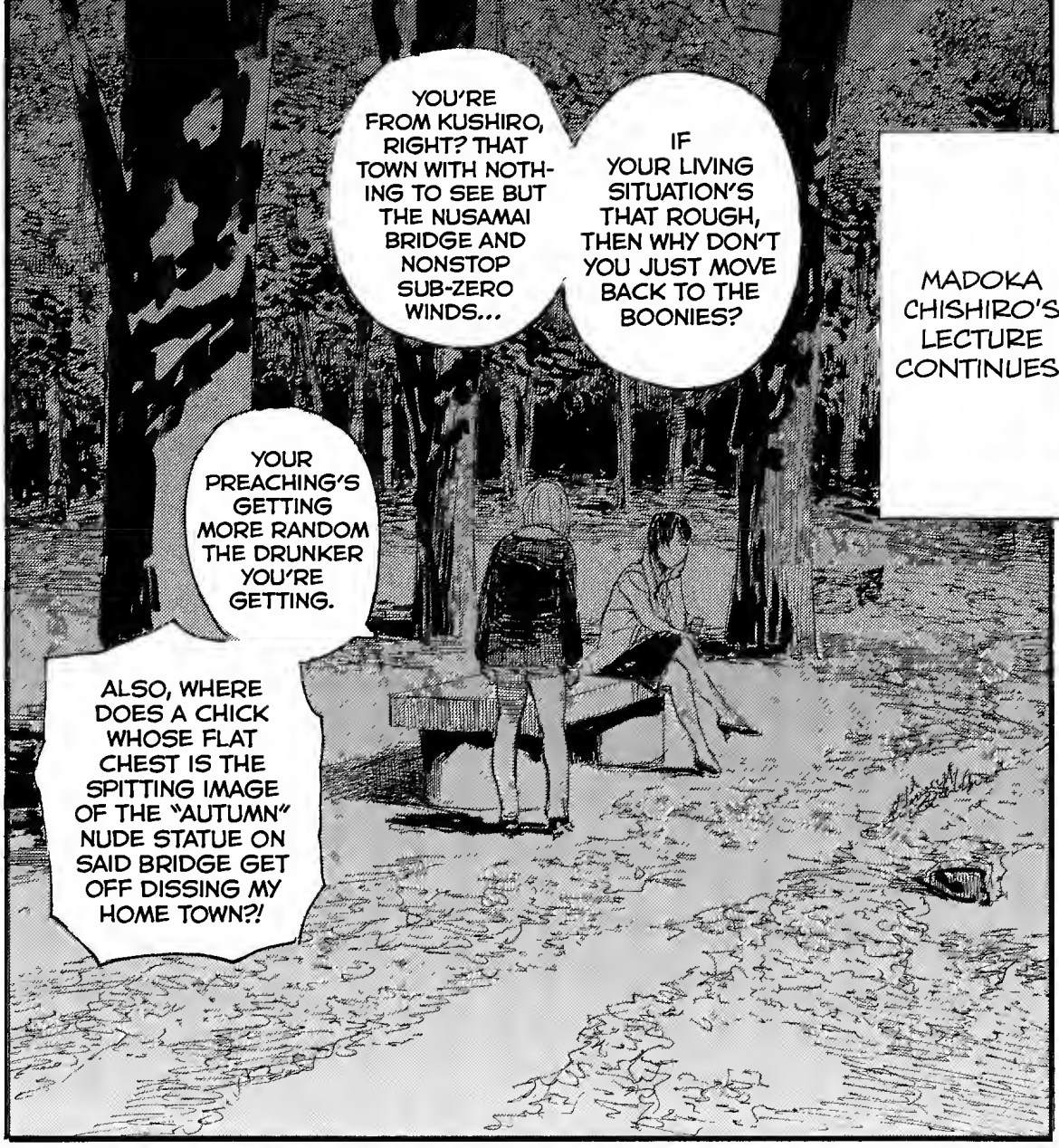

Chapter 26 「I CAN'T GO BACK THERE」
HIROAKI SAMURA
wave
LISTEN TO ME!

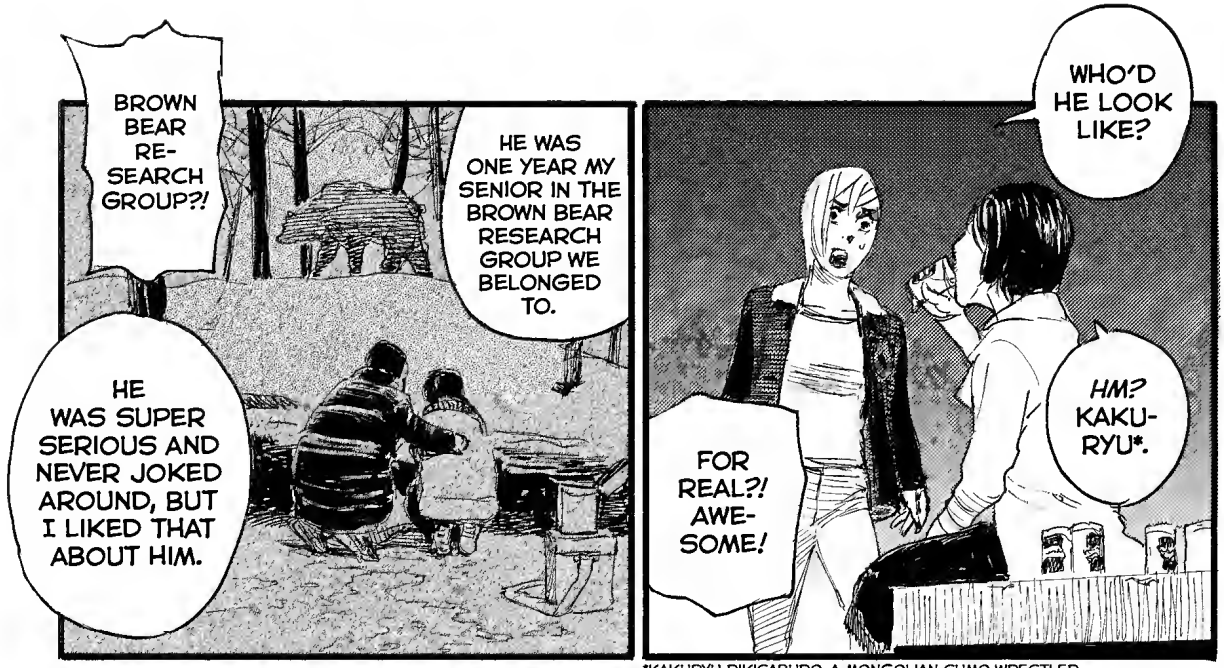

MADOKA CHISHIRO'S LECTURE CONTINUES!
IF YOUR LIVING SITUATION'S THAT ROUGH, THEN WHY DON'T YOU JUST MOVE BACK TO THE BOONIES?
YOU'RE FROM KUSHIRO, RIGHT? THAT TOWN WITH NOTHING TO SEE BUT THE NUSAMAI BRIDGE AND NONSTOP SUB-ZERO WINDS...
YOUR PREACHING'S GETTING MORE RANDOM THE DRUNKER YOU'RE GETTING.
ALSO, WHERE DOES A CHICK WHOSE FLAT CHEST IS THE SPITTING IMAGE OF THE "AUTUMN" NUDE STATUE ON SAID BRIDGE GET OFF DISSING MY HOME TOWN?!

I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN SAPPORO,
BUT THERE WAS THIS GUY I WAS DATING WHEN I WENT TO HOKKAIDO U.
WHAT THE HELL KINDA TANGENT IS THAT?!

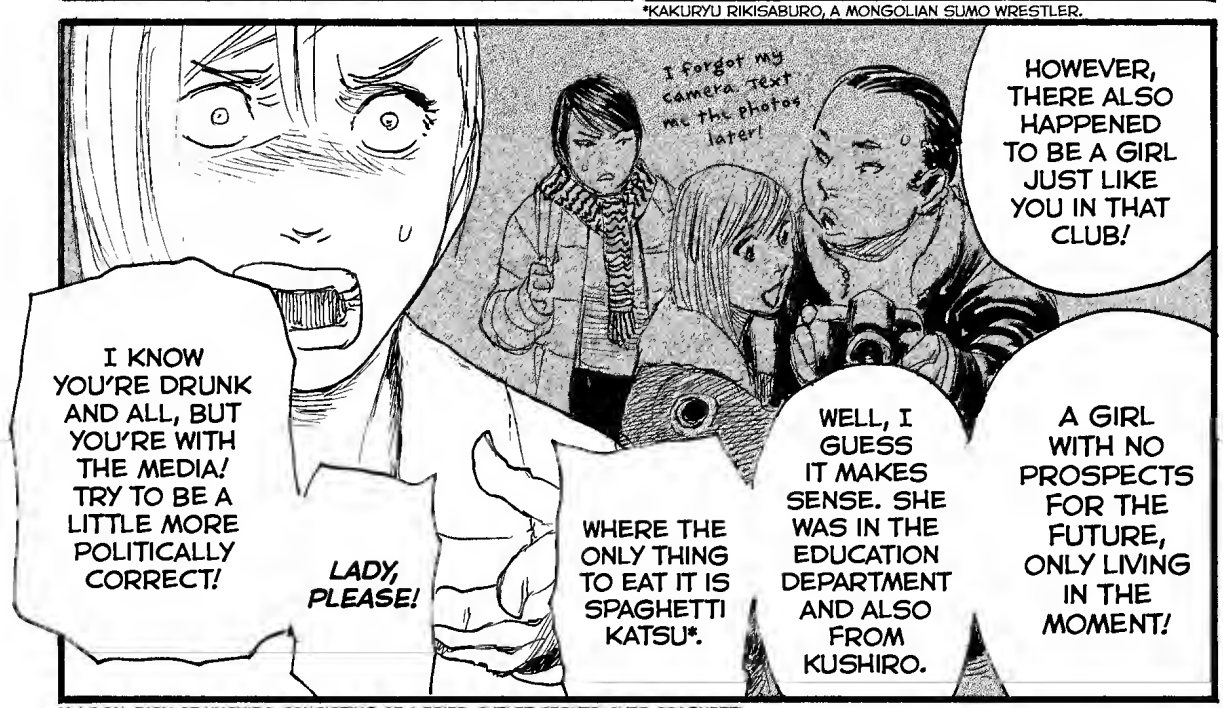
THE STORY SO FAR

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF MATO, AN FM STATION WORKER, MINARE KODA HAS MADE HER DEBUT AS A RADIO DJ. WITH HER THIRD SHOW UNDER HER BELT AND RATINGS HIGH, ONE NIGHT, SHE'S CALLED OUT BY HER SENIOR DJ, CHISHIRO, WHOSE ONSLAUGHT OF CRITICISM LEAVES MINARE BAFFLED. MEANWHILE, OVER AT VOYAGER, TROUBLE STIRS WHEN MAKIE'S OLDER BROTHER SHOWS UP...

THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION. ANY RESEMBLANCES TO REAL PEOPLE, GROUPS, AND PLACES ARE PURELY COINCIDENTAL.


BROWN BEAR RESEARCH GROUP?!
HE WAS ONE YEAR MY SENIOR IN THE BROWN BEAR RESEARCH GROUP WE BELONGED TO.
HE WAS SUPER SERIOUS AND NEVER JOKED AROUND, BUT I LIKED THAT ABOUT HIM.
WHO'D HE LOOK LIKE?
HM? KAKU-RYU*.
FOR REAL?! AWE-SOME!

*KAKURYU RIKISABURO, A MONGOLIAN SUMO WRESTLER.


I forgot my camera. Text me the photos later!
HOWEVER, THERE ALSO HAPPENED TO BE A GIRL JUST LIKE YOU IN THAT CLUB!
I KNOW YOU'RE DRUNK AND ALL, BUT YOU'RE WITH THE MEDIA! TRY TO BE A LITTLE MORE POLITICALLY CORRECT!
LADY, PLEASE!
WHERE THE ONLY THING TO EAT IT IS SPAGHETTI KATSU*.
WELL, I GUESS IT MAKES SENSE. SHE WAS IN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AND ALSO FROM KUSHIRO.
A GIRL WITH NO PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE, ONLY LIVING IN THE MOMENT!

*A LOCAL DISH OF KUSHIRO CONSISTING OF A FRIED CUTLET SERVED OVER SPAGHETTI.

MUCH I CAN'T LET SLIDE, THERE IS.
YOU'RE BOTH DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY TALKING SHIT ABOUT ME, HUH?
A REAL PIECE OF HUMAN GARBAGE WHO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THAT TO GET AHEAD.
...AND WAS A HIT WITH ALL THE GUYS.
SHE WAS BLESSED WITH THE SAME VUL-GAR WIT THAT YOU HAVE...

I NEVER THOUGHT EVEN HE'D FALL FOR HER WILES, THOUGH.
RUSTLE
THUD
THUD
MADOKA-CHAN.
YOU'RE A WOMAN WHO'S PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF MAKING IT ON HER OWN IN THE WORLD.
BUT NOT THAT GIRL.
SHE'LL FALL INTO A HOLE SHE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO CLIMB BACK OUT OF SOMEDAY UNLESS SOMEONE GUIDES HER.
UHH, YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?
I'M PRETTY SURE SHE'S CAPABLE OF LIVING JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE.
MAYBE THE PLACE YOU ASSUME SHE'LL "FALL" TO...
...IS JUST A BIG FUN PARTY VENUE TO HER.
ISN'T THAT KIND OF ARROGANT OF YOU?
ACTUALLY, PEOPLE WHO LIVE UPRIGHT AND HONEST, THINKING THEY'LL GET FARTHER AHEAD THAN THE PEOPLE GOOFING OFF...
...ARE OFTEN THE FIRST ONES TO BREAK WHEN THEY REALIZE THAT'S NOT ALWAYS THE CASE.
DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S WAY MORE LIKELY?

Uhh. Next up, we have one from Miyoshi Combo-san, a 19-year-old college student.
OH, THEY READ IT...
SO, I SENT IN A WALL OF TEXT TO THE RADIO BITCHING ABOUT IT.
YET, I COULDN'T SAY ANY OF THAT TO HIS FACE...
...AND I WAS TOO PROUD TO TALK TO MY FRIENDS ABOUT IT.
...means that you're both roughly around the same academic level, even though you might be in different departments.
Also, you make it sound like she's just mindlessly goofing around...
...but I'm not so sure about that.
You seem to be looking down on her, but when you think about it, the fact that you both go to the same college...
Hmm... Well, it might be hard to understand at 19,
but that's only natural, to be honest.

Frankly, the fact that you're both in college is pretty admirable from my perspective.
Even so, I lived from meager paycheck to paycheck, and now I'm working as a radio DJ.
I dropped out of high school, y'know. I only have a middle-school diploma!
FM
85.2MHz
She could be trying to make as many connections as possible.
...you have to wonder who really has their eyes on the future.
In that sense, between her and someone who does nothing but study...
...GO TO HELL.
Thinking back on it, I only really have memories of partying with my friends.
I can't count how many people I know who'd help me out when I'm in a bind. Partying means building and expanding those sorts of relationships.

TO ALL THE PAINFULLY EARNEST PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOTHING AMUSING TO SAY...
BUT LISTENING TO THAT BROADCAST IS WHAT MADE ME DECIDE TO BECOME A RADIO PERSONALITY.
WELL, CAN'T EXPECT A HIGH-SCHOOL DROPOUT DJ TO HAVE ANYTHING OF VALUE TO SAY...
I WANT TO KEEP TELLING THEM, "IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT."
...I WANT TO TELL THEM, "YOU'RE NOT ALONE."
TO ALL THE UPRIGHT, AWKWARD FOLKS WHO ALWAYS HAVE THE SPOTLIGHT STOLEN FROM THEM BY MORE FLEXIBLE PEOPLE...
MOST PEOPLE END UP PAYING THE PRICE SOMEDAY FOR THAT DEVIL-MAY-CARE ATTITUDE.
THAT JUST MEANS THAT PARTICULAR DJ HAD RIDICULOUS LUCK!
Didn't think you'd make me the face of flexible women.
WHOA, THERE, SEMPAI.
I ENTERED THIS INDUSTRY TO GET REVENGE ON PEOPLE LIKE *YOU!*
THAT'S RIGHT!

SNORE
HEY! ARE YOU LISTENING, CHISHIRO-SAN?!
I MEAN, JUST LOOK AT ME!
...WELL, I DID GET SWOOPED UP BY MATO-SAN WHEN I WAS ON THE VERGE OF GETTING FIRED, BUT STILL!
...AND I DID HAVE AN ADORABLE AD LET ME MOVE IN WITH HER WHEN I HAD TO VACATE MY APARTMENT.
HUH...? WAIT A MINUTE. HAVEN'T I BEEN PRETTY...
NO WAY... WHERE DO I CHANNEL THIS FURY NOW...?
"I" shot!
WOULD YOU LIKE A RE-CEIPT?
NO, THAT'S ALL RIGHT.
MINARE-SAN!
HUH?
...OH!
ADOR-ABLE AD?!

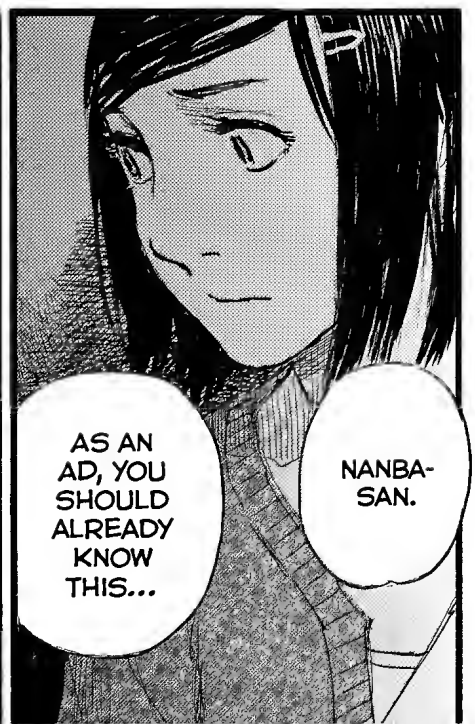
I DIDN'T SNUFF HER!
CAN YOU HELP ME MOVE THIS LADY TO MY CAR?
GOING TO NEED A SHOVEL, BY ANY CHANCE?
UMM. ARE WE...
I'VE NEVER BEEN HAPPIER TO SEE YOU!
WAHHH! HONEY!
WHAT HAP-PENED?
I NEVER KNEW DEALING WITH DRUNK WOMEN WAS THIS BIG OF A PAIN IN THE ASS.
YOU'RE TELLING ME. I'VE GOTTA BE CAREFUL FROM NOW ON.
I SEE... SOUNDS ROUGH.
...MADOKA-SAN IS PRETTY LUCKY, TOO.
BUT YOU KNOW...

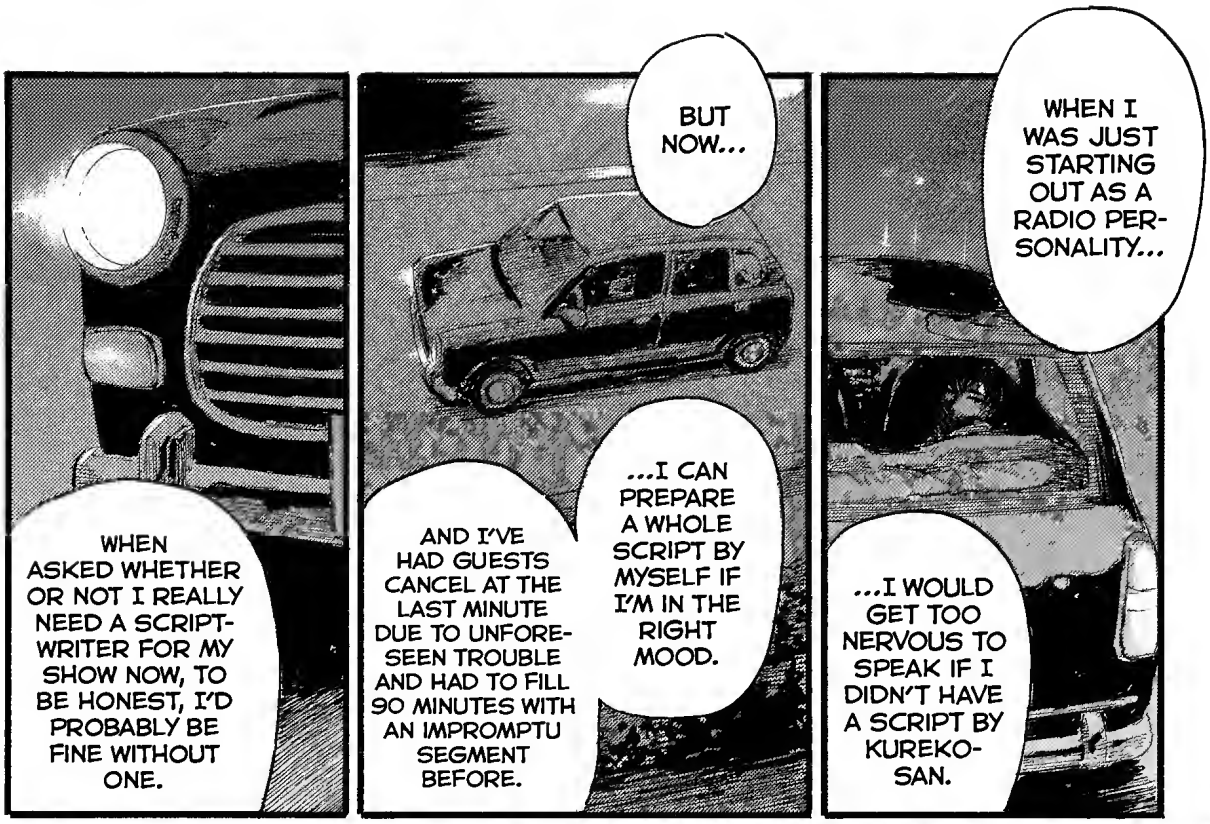
'ZAT RIGHT?
I GUESS MY SHOW MIGHT'VE BEEN TOO DEEP FOR THE SIMPLE MASSES TO COMPREHEND, THEN.
I THOUGHT IT WAS GOOD.
YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW THIS, MINARE-SAN...
...IN NEARLY HALF OF THE SHOWS AIRED ON MRS IN THE 90S, INCLUDING *ONE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS* AND *PICCADILLY CIRCUS*.
...BUT KUREKO-SAN IS AN EXCEPTIONAL WRITER WHO HAD A HAND...
AS A SCRIPTWRITER FOR HER SHOW, *SEPTEMBER BLUE MOON*.
KUREKO-SAN IS INSIDE THE BOOTH WITH MADOKA-SAN,
RUMOR HAS IT MADOKA-SAN BULLIED THE HIGHER-UPS TO MAKE IT THAT WAY.
...BUT EXCLUDING A FEW SPECIALS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, HE'S BEEN WORKING ALMOST ENTIRELY AS MADOKA-SAN'S PERSONAL WRITER.
PARTLY BECAUSE HE'S BEEN BUSY WITH HIS MAIN JOB AS A NOVELIST, MAYBE...
BUT IN RECENT YEARS,
MAYBE THEY'RE JUST EACH OTHER'S FAVORITE.
BEATS ME.
HUH.
I WONDER WHY, THOUGH.
...BUT HE'S STUCK DOING THIS.
KUREKO-SAN IS CAPABLE OF DOING SO MUCH MORE...

...THAT TALENT HAS TO DRY UP EVENTUALLY.
THAT, OR THEY CAN'T KEEP UP WITH THE TIMES.

...NO MATTER HOW TALENTED A WRITER IS...

...BUT AS MUCH AS WE'D LIKE TO HAVE A DIRECTOR, AD, MIXER, AND WRITER FOR EVERY SHOW...
...THOSE DAYS ARE GONE.

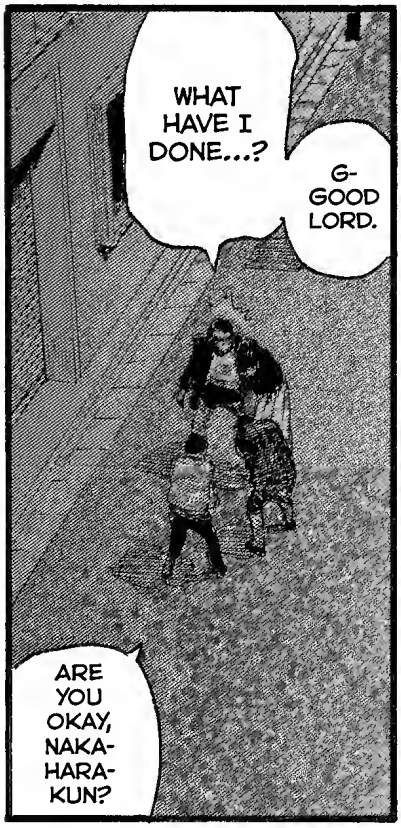

AS AN AD, YOU SHOULD ALREADY KNOW THIS...
NANBA-SAN.


WHEN ASKED WHETHER OR NOT I REALLY NEED A SCRIPT-WRITER FOR MY SHOW NOW, TO BE HONEST, I'D PROBABLY BE FINE WITHOUT ONE.
AND I'VE HAD GUESTS CANCEL AT THE LAST MINUTE DUE TO UNFORE-SEEN TROUBLE AND HAD TO FILL 90 MINUTES WITH AN IMPROMPTU SEGMENT BEFORE.
BUT NOW...
...I CAN PREPARE A WHOLE SCRIPT BY MYSELF IF I'M IN THE RIGHT MOOD.
...I WOULD GET TOO NERVOUS TO SPEAK IF I DIDN'T HAVE A SCRIPT BY KUREKO-SAN.
WHEN I WAS JUST STARTING OUT AS A RADIO PER-SONALITY...

BEFORE LONG, RADIO STATIONS WON'T HAVE "WRITERS" ANYMORE.
IT'S THE STATION'S DECISION.
IT'S NOT HIS MAIN JOB OR MY EGO THAT'S TAKING WORK AWAY FROM KUREKO-SAN.
IF I DON'T, THEN HE WON'T HAVE A PLACE AT MRS* ANYMORE.
...I KEEP TELLING THE PRODUCER THAT I *ABSOLUTELY NEED* KUREKO-SAN.
EVEN SO...
*MRS = MOIWAYAMA RADIO STATION
DON QUIJOTE
CHLAIE of SAVINGS

OH, SURE...
BY THE WAY,
CAN YOU DROP ME OFF NEAR NAKAMURA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL?
WHERE WERE YOU HEADED, ANYWAY?
MT. ICHAN-KOPPE.
AND WHAT'S IN THIS DON QUIXOTE BAG?
A SHOVEL...
...YOU REALLY WERE GOING TO BURY ME, WEREN'T YOU?
I'M SO SORRY, NAKA-HARA-SAN!
UMM... HOW'S YOUR NECK?
I'M FINE, NO BIGGIE. I JUST GOT STRUNG UP A LITTLE.

GWOHHH!


WHAT HAVE I DONE...?
G-GOOD LORD.
ARE YOU OKAY, NAKA-HARA-KUN?

GASP

STOP IT, TORU! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

A THOUSAND PARDONS!
IT'S COOL! I SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE CLEAR.
MY SISTER HAS BEEN IMPOSING ON YOU, AND YET I...
EVER SINCE WE WERE YOUNG, WHENEVER I GET ANGRY OVER SOMETHING REGARDING MY SISTER...
...I TEND TO BLACK OUT TEMPORARILY.
ONE TIME IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, I WENT TO COMPLAIN AT HOME OF A CLASSMATE WHO'D BEEN BULLYING MY SISTER, BUT WHILE TALKING AT THE DOOR, I LOST CONSCIOUSNESS...
Help!
Forgive me!
...AND WHEN I CAME TO, SAID CLASSMATE AND HIS MOTHER WERE BOUND TOGETHER IN A BAMBOO MAT AND DROWNING IN A WATERING HOLE I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE.
AFTER THE FACT, I LEARNED THAT IT WAS LAKE NIIKAPPU, NO FEWER THAN 100 KM FROM THEIR HOME.
UHH... I WAS AT FAULT JUST NOW, BUT YOU REALLY OUGHT TO SEE A DOCTOR ABOUT THAT.
I SWEAR, TORU! WE'VE ALREADY CAUSED SO MUCH TROUBLE FOR THE STORE!
UGH... I'M SORRY.
WHO ARE YOU CALLING?
HEY. GOT A MINUTE?
NAH, I'M STILL AT THE RESTAURANT.

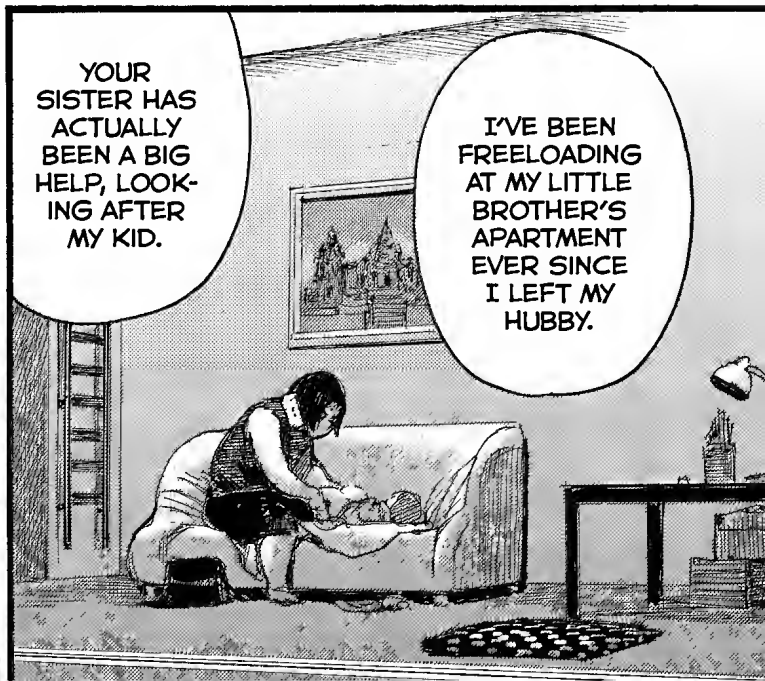
SO, TACHI-BANA-SAN'S BROTHER'S HERE NOW.
HM? YEAH, YEAH.
AND I GUESS HE WANTS TO SPEAK TO YOU, SO I'M GONNA GIVE HIM THE PHONE.

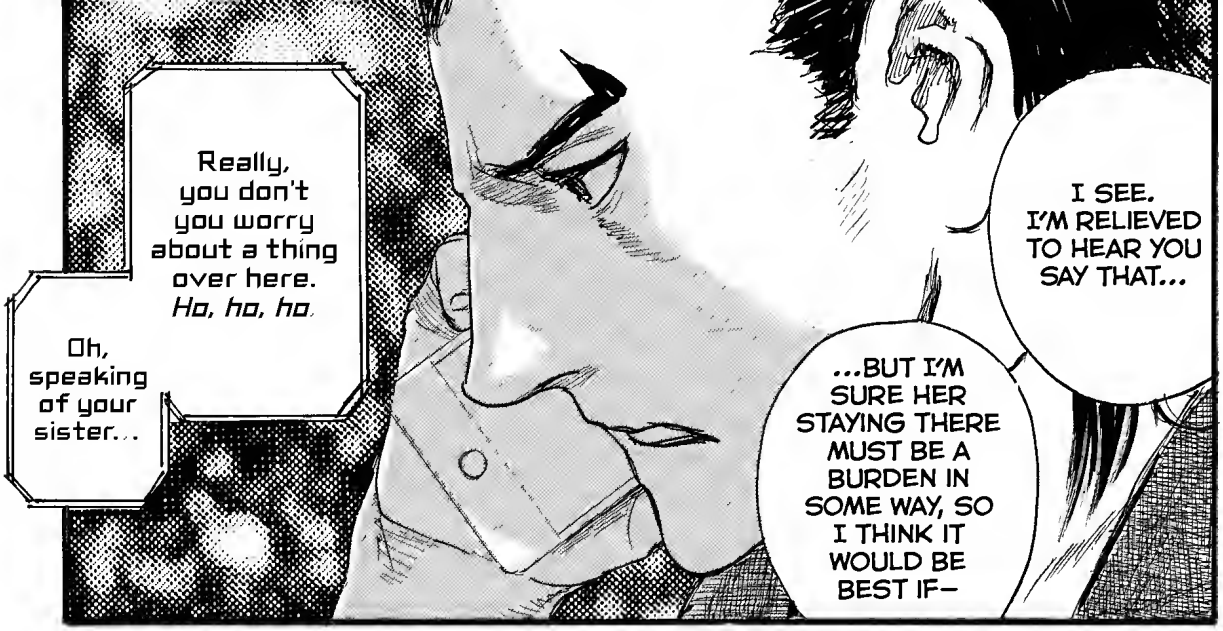
UMM.
I APOLOGIZE FOR MY SISTER'S SELFISH-NESS...
Ah, ha, ha, ha! Selfish-ness? Don't be silly.

... HELLO?
Hello. Pleased to meet you. I'm Chuuya's sister, Meiko.

...

SHE'S SUCH A MODEST GIRL, NOTH-ING LIKE MY BONEHEAD LITTLE BROTHER.
I'M SURE MAKIE-SAN WILL MAKE A FINE WIFE SOMEDAY.


I'VE BEEN FREELOADING AT MY LITTLE BROTHER'S APARTMENT EVER SINCE I LEFT MY HUBBY.
YOUR SISTER HAS ACTUALLY BEEN A BIG HELP, LOOK-ING AFTER MY KID.

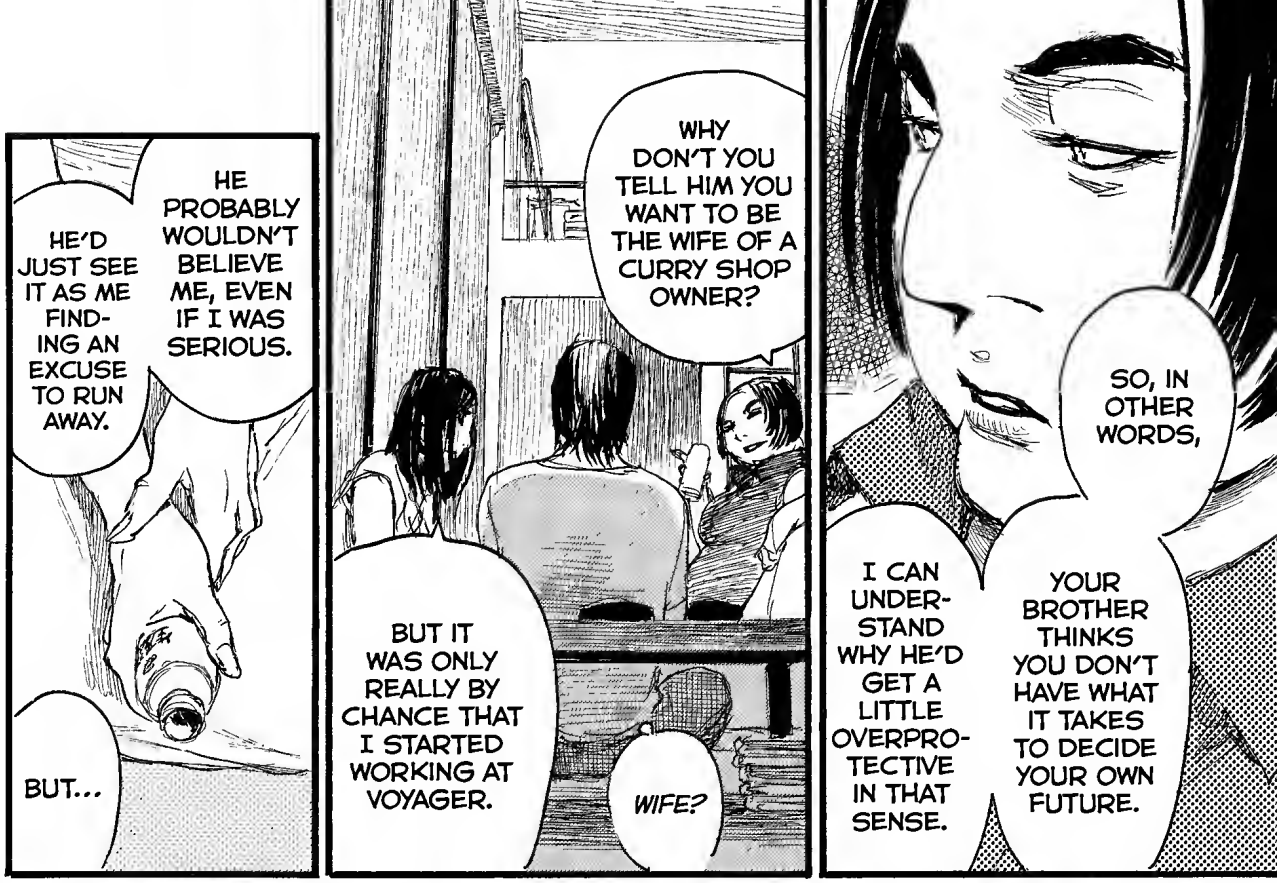

I SEE. I'M RELIEVED TO HEAR YOU SAY THAT...
...BUT I'M SURE HER STAYING THERE MUST BE A BURDEN IN SOME WAY, SO I THINK IT WOULD BE BEST IF—
Really, you don't you worry about a thing over here. Ha, ha, ha.
Oh, speaking of your sister...

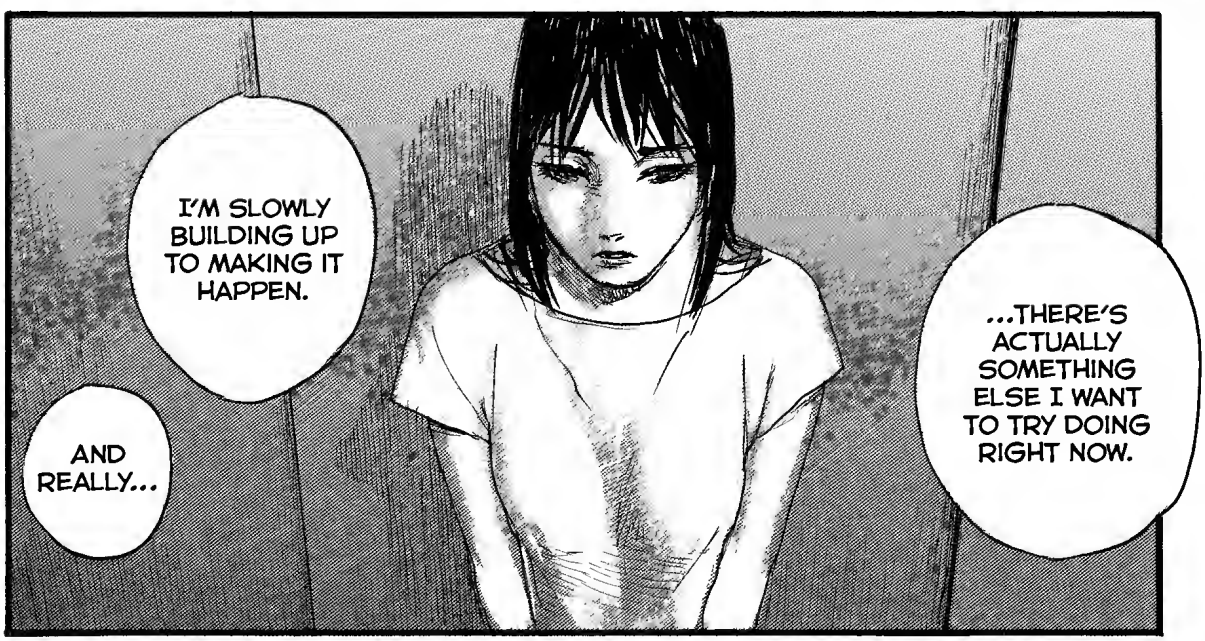
IS THAT SO? UMM...
UH-HUH...
I SHOULD GIVE THE PHONE BACK TO YOUR BROTHER NOW...

MORAL OF THE STORY, DON'T UNDERESTIMATE A BORED HOUSEWIFE'S GOSSIP STOCK.
YOU REALLY SAVED OUR ASSES.
I COULD SEE HER BROTHER'S MIASMA GRADUALLY DISSIPATE.
BUT... I DO AGREE WITH MY BROTHER.

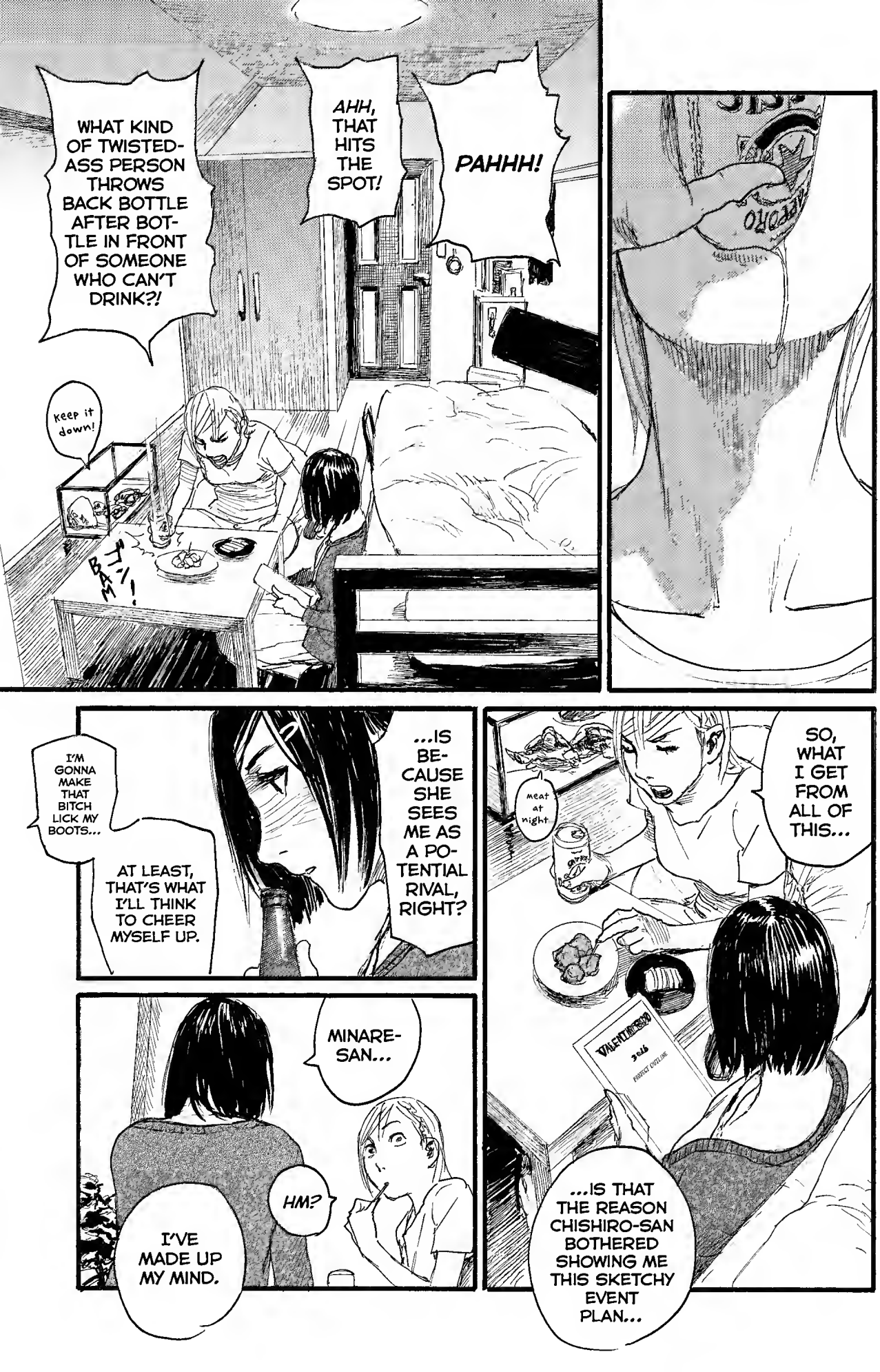
I STRONGLY FEEL THAT I NEED TO LEAVE HERE AS SOON AS I CAN.
BUT...
...I'D LIKE TO KEEP WORKING AT VOY-AGER, IF POSSI-BLE.
I WANT TO WORK IN THE SAME KITCHEN AS NAKA-HARA-SAN.
THANK YOU FOR COVERING FOR ME EARLIER.
IT, UMM...
MADE ME REALLY HAPPY.
HUH? NO PROB.
I WONDER IF HE REALIZES HE'S THE SKETCHIEST KIND OF GUY THERE IS.
WE'RE WORK BUDDIES, AFTER ALL.
BUT IF YOU MOVE OUT OF HERE...
...WILL YOU GO BACK HOME?
I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO MY BROTHER'S HOUSE.

...AND LIVE A DRAB, WORRILESS LIFE AS A FULL-TIME HOUSEWIFE.
HE SERIOUSLY THINKS THAT WOULD MAKE ME HAPPIEST.
HE'D RATHER I STAY SHELTERED FROM THE WORLD...
...FIND MYSELF A BANKER OR CIVIL SERVANT...
...GO TO A MARRIAGE HUNTING PARTY...
DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN MEIKO-SAN ASKED...
...WHAT EXACTLY MY BROTHER WANTS TO DO WITH ME?
I guess that's just one modern indulgence.
IT MADE ME REALIZE JUST HOW HELPLESS OF A SITUATION I'D GOTTEN MYSELF IN.
WHEN I HEARD THE WORD "MARRIAGE" COME OUT OF MY BROTHER'S MOUTH,
I'M SURPRISED HE'S OKAY WITH YOU GOING TO MARRIAGE HUNTING PARTIES.
WELL, YOU'D DEFINITELY BE POPULAR AT THOSE KINDS OF SHINDIGS.
...AND TELL HIM WHAT I WANTED TO BE OR WHAT KIND OF LIFE I WANTED. I WAS TOO AFRAID TO.
...NEVER ONCE DID I TRY TO ASSERT MYSELF TO MY BROTHER...
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT...


HE'D JUST SEE IT AS ME FIND-ING AN EXCUSE TO RUN AWAY.
HE PROBABLY WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME, EVEN IF I WAS SERIOUS.
BUT...
WHY DON'T YOU TELL HIM YOU WANT TO BE THE WIFE OF A CURRY SHOP OWNER?
BUT IT WAS ONLY REALLY BY CHANCE THAT I STARTED WORKING AT VOYAGER.
WIFE?
SO, IN OTHER WORDS,
I CAN UNDER-STAND WHY HE'D GET A LITTLE OVERPRO-TECTIVE IN THAT SENSE.
YOUR BROTHER THINKS YOU DON'T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO DECIDE YOUR OWN FUTURE.


I'M SLOWLY BUILDING UP TO MAKING IT HAPPEN.
AND REALLY...
...THERE'S ACTUALLY SOMETHING ELSE I WANT TO TRY DOING RIGHT NOW.

IT FEELS LIKE FATE IN A WAY.
IF I HADN'T STARTED WORKING AT VOYAGER.
...IT'S SOMETHING I MIGHT NEVER HAVE THOUGHT TO TRY...


WHAT KIND OF TWISTED-ASS PERSON THROWS BACK BOTTLE AFTER BOTTLE IN FRONT OF SOMEONE WHO CAN'T DRINK?!
AHH, THAT HITS THE SPOT!
PAHHH!
keep it down!
BAM
SO, WHAT I GET FROM ALL OF THIS...
meat at night
...IS THAT THE REASON CHISHIRO-SAN BOTHERED SHOWING ME THIS SKETCHY EVENT PLAN...
...IS BECAUSE SHE SEES ME AS A POTENTIAL RIVAL, RIGHT?
I'M GONNA MAKE THAT BITCH LICK MY BOOTS...
AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I'LL THINK TO CHEER MYSELF UP.
MINARE-SAN...
HM?
I'VE MADE UP MY MIND.

I'M GOING TO DO EVERY-THING I CAN TO BECOME A CHIEF DIRECTOR WITHIN THE NEXT TWO YEARS.
AND WITH YOU, MINARE KODA, AS MY MAIN DJ,
AND KATSUMI KUREKO ONBOARD AS A SCRIPTWRITER, IN THE STRONGEST LINEUP I CAN IMAGINE...

...I'LL CONVINCE THE PRODUCER TO LET ME MAN-AGE AN ENTIRE THREE-HOUR BLOCK!
BETWEEN THE THREE OF US...
...IT'LL BECOME A SHOW OF LEGENDS! THAT'S THE ONLY FUTURE I ENVISION!

NO, THANKS!
ANY WRITER BUT HIM! SERIOUSLY!
WHAAAT?!

MIZU-HO!
GRAB
MINARE-SAN!